

February 3, 2011

**Testimony of Deborah Tadduni, Director of Family & Children's Agency's Therapeutic & Medically
Complex Foster Care Program**

Related to Senate Bill Number 844: An Act Adopting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights

To the distinguished members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention to the issues before you today.

My name is Deborah Tadduni, Director of Family & Children's Agency therapeutic and medically complex foster care program. I have worked in the Human Service field for over thirty years; more specifically, I have worked in the foster care system for approximately fifteen years. Previous to working as a social worker, I served as a foster parent for fifteen years through a non-profit agency. During my time as a foster parent, I adopted three special needs children from the system. In addition, I have facilitated support groups for foster parents and served on an advisory board as a foster parent. Currently, I am a member of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits.

Adopting a Bill of Rights for foster parents is a critical component to validating the difficult work our families perform on a daily basis. It is through this support and validation that foster parents continue to provide stable and loving homes for children in need. In my experience both working as a social worker and foster parent, foster parents are more likely to provide long term homes when they feel valued by providers and social workers. Further, foster parents are more likely to remain committed to the child and maintaining the placement when they feel respected for the challenging work they perform. When a foster parent is treated as an equal partner in the treatment team a positive working relationship is established between the family, child, and system. As a foster parent myself, I can attest that it was the deep level of support and respect from providers that helped me throughout difficult moments.

Alternatively, when foster parents do not feel respected they are left feeling like victims of the foster care system; consequently, we have lost numerous foster families, our most valuable resource.

Not only does the Bill of Rights validate and respect our parents, it gives them a platform to advocate for the child's needs. It allows the parents to have input in the decision making process regarding the child's educational, medical, and therapeutic needs. Foster parents develop relationships with our children and it is through these relationships that they are better able to advocate in the child's best interest. By involving foster parents in treatment planning goals and meetings, foster children receive care that encompasses all facets of life.

The Bill of Rights serves an economical purpose as well. The validation of foster parents results in an increase in level of commitment to our children for long term placements. In addition, the Bill supports and values the parent's assessment and input on the services needed in the home. The level of commitment, in conjunction with a parent's advocacy efforts, will serve as a tool to maintain children in home settings rather than cycle in and out of residential facilities. It is known that not only are children more successful in homes, but that placement in a home bears far less of a financial burden on the system than a residential setting.

For far too long families have been silenced; however, if approved, the Bill of Rights gives families back a voice. It is a framework necessary for effective treatment to children and families. By adopting a Bill of Rights for our foster parents, we continue to support and protect those individuals that commit to children in care. The Bill of Rights will significantly benefit our parents and, more importantly, the children we continue to serve.

Thank You

Debbie Tadduni, LCSW
Director, Specialized Foster Care
Family & Children's Agency
149 Water Street
Norwalk, CT 06850
203-523-5322